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CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

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Possibilities for the development of citizenship identity in the process of cross-cultural education in Latvia

Inese Jurgena

Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy (Latvia)

Zigurds Mikainis

Department of Law, Latvijas Universitate (Latvia)

Introduction

The ideals of democratic European society in the 21st century include social harmony, the involvement of all people in social processes, tolerance towards and respect of otherness, as well as the preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity. In this respect, the development of citizenship identity in conditions of cultural interaction is essential.

Respect and tolerance of other cultures, ethnic inclusion, and the overcoming of narrow ethnocentrism are highly valued. *Education for the 21st Century* (UNESCO International Commission) claims that one of the principal tasks of education is ‘learning to live together, to develop one’s understanding about others and their history, traditions, and spiritual values’ (*Outlines of Future Education*, 2000, p 18). In Latvia we need to overcome both ethnic isolation and elements of alienation in society, and to evaluate the role of education in the development of a uniform Latvian citizenship identity. The alienation of individuals from the state, caused by a lack of the sense of belonging to Latvian society, is disquieting.

This article will analyse the possibilities for the development of citizenship identity in the process of cross-cultural education in Latvia.

The concept of citizenship identity and the principal factors in its development in Latvia

The understanding of citizenship and identity became topical issues in Latvia after independence was regained. This was closely connected with the transition to a civic society, the formation of the political nation, and the development of national identity.

There is no common view in Latvia about the content of citizenship identity, which has been affected by historically changing criteria about the concept of a nation. In opposition to traditional ethnocentric views, a new understanding is being formed, of the individual as belonging to the civic body and to the state, and this does not conflict with the idea of different cultural identities. This is an advance to a broader understanding of national identification in Latvia, which can be called the political (civil) Latvian nation.

In the late 1990s, some Latvian scholars promoted the idea of an incorporating political nation, that would ensure harmony in the multicultural Latvian society. According to Dribin, the modern political nation is democratic, pluralistic, and tolerant in ethnic relations (Dribin, 1997, p 2). Tisenkofs points out that while the ethnic factor is a crucial element of identity, it is equally important to hold all society together and to form a political nation (Tisenkofs, 1997). As a result of such views, a new structure of citizenship identity is developing in Latvian society.

Smith suggests the concepts of ethnic communities and nations coincide to a great extent, both historically and conceptually; however, they are two different concepts and historical formations (Smith, 1997, p 49). Starting from this, Driba offers an interpretation of national identity and citizenship identity, in which the concept of national identity includes cultural, historical, and citizenship aspects. The cultural and historical aspects manifest themselves as deliberate and sincere identification with the historical experience of the nation and its culture, while citizenship manifests itself as a sense of belonging and identification with society, a readiness to promote the consolidation of that society, and solidarity and creative cooperation between all ethnic and social groups.

The specific features of the formation of citizenship identity in Latvia are determined by several factors, the most significant of which are demographic, ethno-political, and social-pedagogic. There has never been a mono-ethnic society in Latvia. At present, Latvians constitute 58.6% of the total population, with the majority ethnic minority being East Slavs (35.7%). Zvidriņš concludes that Latvia's high migration rate is a consequence of the Second World War and the Soviet occupation. The demographic reality is the first factor stimulating integration processes in Latvia.

The preconditions for social integration and the development of citizenship identity require the implementation of a model of social integration that will balance the ethnic Latvian culture with the development of a modern European civic society. The Latvian language and culture as elements of the content of integration will have to be supplemented by the development of citizenship identity. Ideally, each Latvian inhabitant will be also a Latvian citizen: each a member of civic society even if he/she has a different ethnic origin.

Latvia's status in Europe and the world is changing rapidly. Ethnic policy should be based on the following:

1. Globalisation, as Latvia's openness to the world presents several challenges related to identity. None of the Latvian ethnic identities are isolated from Latvian foreign and domestic policy and the processes of cultural development: the acceptance of the individual aspects of the different ethnic groups - culture, religion, and habits – need to be included in the policy.
2. The development and stability of the Latvian language as a state language is not within a sterile and isolated linguistic environment, but as a language used in all spheres of daily life, thus the non-Latvian population must be involved in the development of the state language.
3. Public mechanisms for protecting the interests of various ethnic groups should be established. All ethnic groups will realise that the ethnic policy of the state provides favourable conditions for the development of their identity. The conformity of ethnic policy with the classic ideas of the European political philosophy should be viewed within the context of a society, not from a metaphysical viewpoint about the existence of ethnic affiliation (Rozenvalds, 2000, p 130).

If the education system is to be the main instrument in developing values and tolerance in civic society, the implementation of a citizenship education programme is important for future generations. This programme should summarise the best professional experience of teachers, have integrated study programs for training teachers of social subjects in the higher education institutions, and prepare the teachers who could promote citizenship education. Several models of bilingual education have been established in Latvia: children start their education in their native (minority) language and the ratio of the state language is increased gradually. As well as social science education, other important factors in developing citizenship awareness and social integration include class meetings and extracurricular activities.

In the educational process it is impossible to separate two aspects of citizenship identity - the cultural-historical and citizenship. However, it is necessary to distinguish the pedagogic criteria for citizenship identity: communicative competence in Latvian (and at least one minority language); knowledge of the interconnections of Latvian culture and European culture; basic human rights; understanding of the democratic institution of citizenship; intercultural communication and cooperation skills; attitude to the Latvian cultural values and acceptance of national symbols; tolerance to the cultural values of ethnic minorities; and ethnic inclusion (Driba, 2003, p 55).

Proficiency in the Latvian language to a large extent affects the ability to fit into Latvian society and also facilitates communication between different ethnic groups, but the principle of mutuality determines the need to have at least one minority language, to express respect and a wish to understand each other. It is also important to understand the interconnections between Latvians and neighbouring nations and to acquire intercultural communication skills which include empathy, forms of verbal and non-verbal expression and their interpretation, active listening skills, conflict resolution skills, etc. Jandt (2001, p 44) points out that several skills are necessary for successful intercultural communication - self-confidence, self-awareness, empathy, quick adaptation to new situations and norms, initiative and an openness to otherness.

The pedagogic model for the formation of citizenship identity in the process of cross-cultural education

In the Latvian situation the philosophy, methodology, and implementation of cross-cultural education are very important issues. The principles of cross-cultural education correspond to the ideals of the European society in the 21st century. Cultural pluralism, along with the corresponding legislation, creates an opportunity for the development of multicultural education, for example, curricula facilitating the formation of citizenship identity.

According to Mall, the intercultural process has four major dimensions - philosophical, religious, political, and pedagogic (Mall, 1997). Intercultural education facilitates

people's openness to mutual understanding, their willingness to understand and to be understood. He characterises an intercultural approach as an attitude that there is no single culture common to all the humanity; there has to be respect and tolerance for different cultural values. Mall points out that intercultural education is directly responsible for the implementation of these ideals. Consequently, the educational process should promote self-confidence, openness to new and strange things and the ability of young people to understand the situation and feelings of others.

The necessity of intercultural education is determined by the increasing number of contacts between nations and the growth of multicultural societies as a result of immigration and cultural enrichment. In Latvia too, migration has changed the ethnic structure of society: Latvians need to learn to coexist with otherness.

These dimensions of cultural interaction and social life outline the possibilities for the formation of a new citizenship identity.

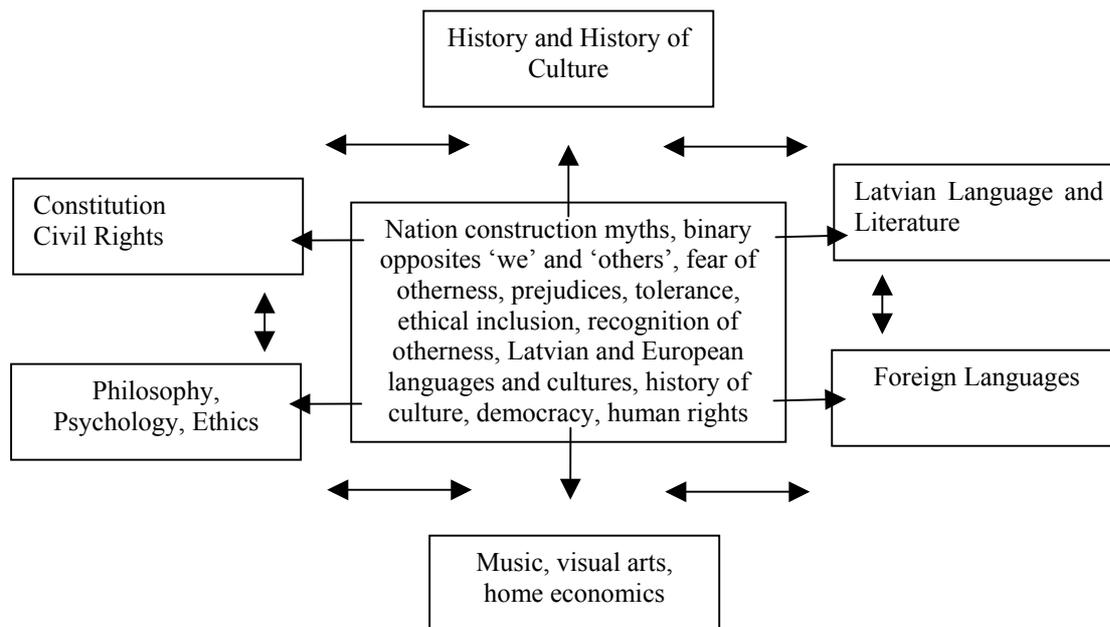
This model does not require a special subject, devoted to the promotion of citizenship identity. The interconnections between Latvian and European cultures, the skills of cross-cultural communication, and basic human rights all have to be acquired gradually. Similar issues can be tackled in various school subjects. Ideally, the teacher of civil rights agrees with the teachers of ethics, psychology, and history on the simultaneous treatment of the concept of 'ethnic inclusion' in their teaching.

The present pedagogic model concerns three basic pedagogic areas that partly overlap: intercultural communication, basic human rights, and emotional intelligence. Depending on the pedagogic criteria, the model presupposes the acquisition of both language and knowledge, bearing in mind objective cultural differences, respecting them, and avoiding the construction of binary opposites 'we' and 'others', and changing the attitudes by being aware of one's own values and stereotypes.

Ethnic inclusion, tolerance, and empathy are formed through acquiring the content, not only at a cognitive level. Emotional experience and the use of interactive methods - case studies, discussions on how film or book characters would behave in some real life situations, sharing of students' own experience in communicating with people from other cultures – form an important element of this. Another factor is the school environment, which should promote participation and the values of mutual respect and trust, encouragement, and cooperation, so that no student feels excluded.

The present model is based on the principles of intercultural learning developed by Hapgood and Fennes (1997):

- recognition of cultural diversity (the difference in values, norms, etc) and respect to otherness;
- mutual enrichment and learning from other people.

Figure 1: A model for the development of citizenship identity (Dirba, 2003)

The principal tasks of intercultural education resulting from these principles are as follows:

- overcoming of ethnocentrism;
- development of empathy;
- openness to otherness.

One criterion for the development of citizenship identity in Latvia is a tolerance towards ethnic minority cultures. According to Lakritz (1999, p 45), tolerance is a personal quality that can be characterised as recognition and respect of the values, views, beliefs, and behaviour of other people. He emphasises that a person can behave in an intolerant way unconsciously. That is why each individual has to be aware of his/her own values and prejudices. Tolerance as a personal quality can manifest itself in relationships with:

- people of a different ethnic origin
- people with disabilities and special needs
- the environment (animals, plants)
- elderly people
- poor people;
- people with different views.

An individual who is intolerant to other individuals can behave intolerantly to other nations, which is why it is important to promote tolerance in any form of communication.

Teachers and parents serve as models in promoting tolerance. Some techniques for promoting tolerance are discussions on how students might behave if they were the protagonists in situations presented in books or films; examples from history; discussions of specific cases; and simulations. In the post-communist reality several values that were unacceptable to the previous regime have come to the fore: freedom, personal initiative, autonomy, social dialogue and tolerance. Tolerance is one of the post-materialistic values characteristic of post-modern societies, while in the post-communist countries material values like money and a well-paid job dominate among young people. The Soviet heritage hinders the development of tolerance, which was unacceptable to the Soviet regime: there was one single truth and categorical statements were intolerant of other opinions. The promotion of tolerance is consequently more difficult in post-communist states than elsewhere in Europe.

Porter (1998, p215) characterises intercultural learning as the development of emotions and the promotion of understanding, listening, empathy, and dialogue. One of the pedagogic criteria of citizenship identity is understanding and observing basic human rights. The principles of intercultural education and basic human rights, values, and methods overlap to a large extent. During values education, students gradually acquire more complicated concepts and values that derive from the central value of respect for the individual (equality, individual freedom, democratic and civic participation). For instance, history classes should not focus on conquests, but on the evolution of understanding human rights and the ideas of collective solidarity which became topical in the first half of the twentieth century and have grown in importance. Both intercultural education and the acquisition of human rights are based on similar principles.

The understanding of objective differences only promotes cross-cultural communication and skills of coexistence with others if the common unifying elements are emphasised. It is important to perceive differences as complementary features. Several authors who have analysed the fear of otherness and its psychological mechanism (such as Kristeva, Katman, Kruger-Potratc, Telus, and Bartminsky) have concluded that people project their personal insecurity onto others, seeing them as a threat, and thus protect their self-image from self-criticism. Features that differ from the self-image are excluded and projected on to a stranger. The constructions of the binary opposites 'we' and 'they' is a schema of perception. However, the change of perception or deconstruction of this is a lengthy process. According to Kule and Kulis

Recognition of basic human rights requires overcoming egoistic, individualistic, and intolerant attitudes to others and otherness. Understanding the sense of otherness, its moral and existential content, requires developed philosophical thinking. Therefore, the concept of civil liberties should enter the vocabulary of all the languages and cultures. (Kule and Kulis, 1996, p 644).

The role of pedagogy is to promote the self-understanding and self-confidence of young people, their openness to otherness, and the ability to understand the situation of others.

The purpose of the pedagogical model is to overcome isolation, exclusion, and confrontation and to promote mutual trust, acceptance, understanding, and cooperation in Latvian society, in order to facilitate the formation of a consolidated political nation. Intercultural learning is social learning, and it requires solidarity, not competition, in order to promote team spirit among both teachers and students. Individual attitudes are known to develop in interaction with the social environment, and school is a small part of this environment. Therefore, the effectiveness of the pedagogic process depends on the attitude of the society. If teachers promote values like solidarity and equality, but are not considered important outside school, a positive result cannot be expected. According to Goulman (2001, p 404) the best results can be expected from the programmes started at an early age and continued throughout the school years, involving teachers, parents, and the whole society.

To promote citizenship identity, a course on cross-cultural communication must be included in the curricula of all institutions of higher education. It should include the development of emotional intelligence and the acquisition of basic human rights. The curricula of teacher training and further education institutions should also include a course in Intercultural Studies. This requires the cooperation of various institutions of higher education and academics. The possibilities for the successful development of citizenship identity in Latvia are based on overcoming isolation, ethnic exclusion, and confrontation and promoting of mutual trust, acceptance, understanding, and cooperation to facilitate the development of a consolidated Latvian nation.

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